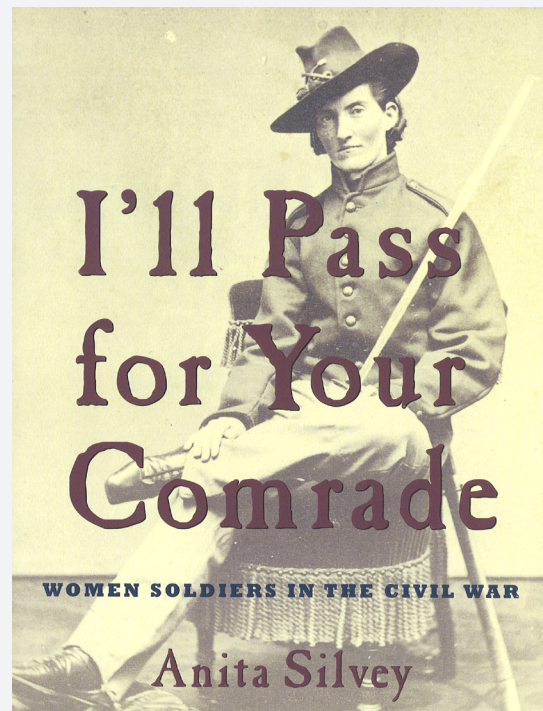
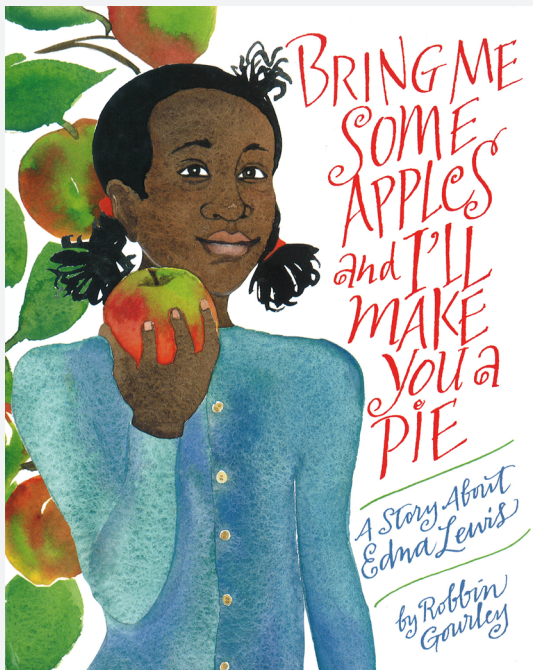


First Opinion: Women of Distinction

Gourley, Robbin. *Bring Me Some Apples and I'll Make You a Pie: A Story about Edna Lewis*. New York: Clarion, 2009.

Silvey, Anita. *I'll Pass for Your Comrade: Women Soldiers in the Civil War*. New York: Clarion Books, 2008.

Akilah Brown



Bring Me Some Apples and I'll Make You a Pie: A Story about Edna Lewis by Robbin Gourley is a picture book about one aspect of the childhood of Edna Lewis, a famous chef: her experience with harvest while growing up in a farming community. That Lewis grows up to be a famous chef is not in the story, and so it is included in an author's note at the back of the book. This is an interesting format choice, because most children probably will not immediately recognize the name Edna Lewis and may, in fact, be looking for information about who she is and why she warrants a story, especially because her name is a part of the title. Without that information, the book could just as easily be about any young

girl who lives on a farm, providing readers with a glimpse of farm life. The reader who is unfamiliar with biography may consider this a fictional tale.

Robbin Gourley starts her book with the whippoorwill calling for the spring harvest, then follows Edna and her family from the first spring harvest of strawberries to the final fall harvest of pecans and walnuts, ending with the family sitting down to a supper during winter. Gourley uses dialogue and illustrations to highlight what food is being harvested and the work that goes into harvesting each crop. There are also suggestions for different ways of eating each food included in the narrative. The suggestions range from desserts such as strawberry shortcake, to simple lunch fare like a tomato sandwich, to dishes that may be unfamiliar such as watermelon pickles. At the very end of the book, there are five recipes “meant to be made with adult supervision and enjoyed by the whole family” as well as a list of Edna Lewis’s cookbooks to encourage cooking as a shared experience (Gourley 41).

The theme of family preparing and enjoying meals together is represented throughout the book; the illustrations include different members of the family, and at the end, the whole family sits down to a meal. The food, though, is the star of the book’s illustrations. The emphasis is on the landscape and the trees and the food to be harvested. Bright and lush colors are used on each page so that it is easy to imagine actually seeing the food on the farm and experiencing the joy of collecting produce. In the author’s note, Gourley explains that one of Lewis’s most significant contributions was making people aware of how to grow and prepare their own food by bringing ingredients “directly from the field to the table,” and the book’s illustrations and narrative emphasize that key element of Lewis’s childhood experience so that readers understand why a grown-up Lewis would want to share fresh food with others (Gourley 40).

Anita Silvey’s *I’ll Pass for Your Comrade* focuses on a different kind of contribution from a different kind of historical figure: women soldiers in the Civil War. More specifically, Silvey gives an account of the women who passed as men to gain entry into the war and explains why and, especially, how they did it. Using first person accounts from letters and memoirs, Silvey crafts a complete picture of the different kinds of women who joined the war effort as soldiers and the cultural and political landscapes that allowed them to do so.

I’ll Pass for Your Comrade is divided into seven chapters, each with a specific focus about an aspect of being a woman soldier in the war. Within each chapter, Silvey answers every question imaginable about the hows and whys of passing as a male soldier: the reasons for joining the war effort, how they went undiscovered for so long, how they may have been caught, what happened if they were caught, what happened when they went home, how they were viewed by society at large, and why so little is known about them. Silvey spends just as much time giving the women voice as giving facts about the war, so readers are left with a complete picture of the Civil War and all of its participants. Pictures, illustrations, official documents, songs, and excerpts of letters appear on almost

every page, lending the book cachet. Remarkably, by using this format, Silvey allows the women to speak for themselves, even as she shapes their stories into an excellent example of documented history accessible to young readers.

Throughout, Silvey explicitly refers to several books and papers; at the end she provides a comprehensive bibliography. That, combined with an author's note that explains how and why she became interested in the subject of women soldiers, should effectively encourage additional exploration of the subject matter. Silvey encourages further study through her use of different pictures and illustrations. These pictures offer a mini-history of photography and the process used to develop and share pictures. For example, on page 17, Silvey explains that the popular albumen print was bound to the paper using egg whites. It is tidbits like these that provide a meta-narrative for the book and give it an even richer context. There is history to be learned about history, and Silvey provides incentive to want to learn and know more.

I'll Pass for Your Comrade and *Bring Me Some Apples and I'll Make You a Pie* are vastly different in style, length, and genre. However, they do have a lot in common. Both focus on significant contributions made by women, and both invite and encourage readers to learn more about the women featured and the topics covered.

About the Author

Akilah Brown is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Florida where she studies representations of female friendship in young adult literature. She received an MA in creative writing from Iowa State University.